

Breaking Down Internet Barriers

By MHS Staff

If your health care organization plans to do business abroad, promote products or services in other countries, or contact prospective non-English-speaking clients, it's a good idea to get online. Before you start to develop a global Internet marketing strategy, however, it's important to learn more about the citizens of this wired world. This means finding out who's online, what countries they represent, and what languages they're speaking.

According to Global Reach, an international Internet consulting firm, 505 million individuals worldwide were plugged into the Internet circa 2000. (The dates of record for different countries range from 1998 to 2001.) Of this number, more than 175 million (35%) reside in the United States. The next largest numbers are reported for Japan (47 million), Germany (27.9 million), China (26.5 million), the United Kingdom (23.9 million), and Korea (22.3 million). The table below presents the top-20 countries in terms of Internet linkup.

It's also important to know the primary language that people use when accessing the Web. In 2000 (note caveat above), 220.4 million (44%) Internet users were English speakers. Of the remaining 54%, only some understand English. For the

non-English speakers, 163 million (32% of the total and 55% of the non-English speakers) speak a European language. The largest numbers among these European-language speakers report as their primary language Spanish (34.6 million), German (32.2 million), Italian (19.5 million), French (16.8 million), Portuguese (12.8 million), Dutch (11.1 million), and combined Scandinavian languages (11.1 million).

Another 129.5 million Internet users speak primarily an "Asian" language. The major groups identified here are Chinese (47.5 million),

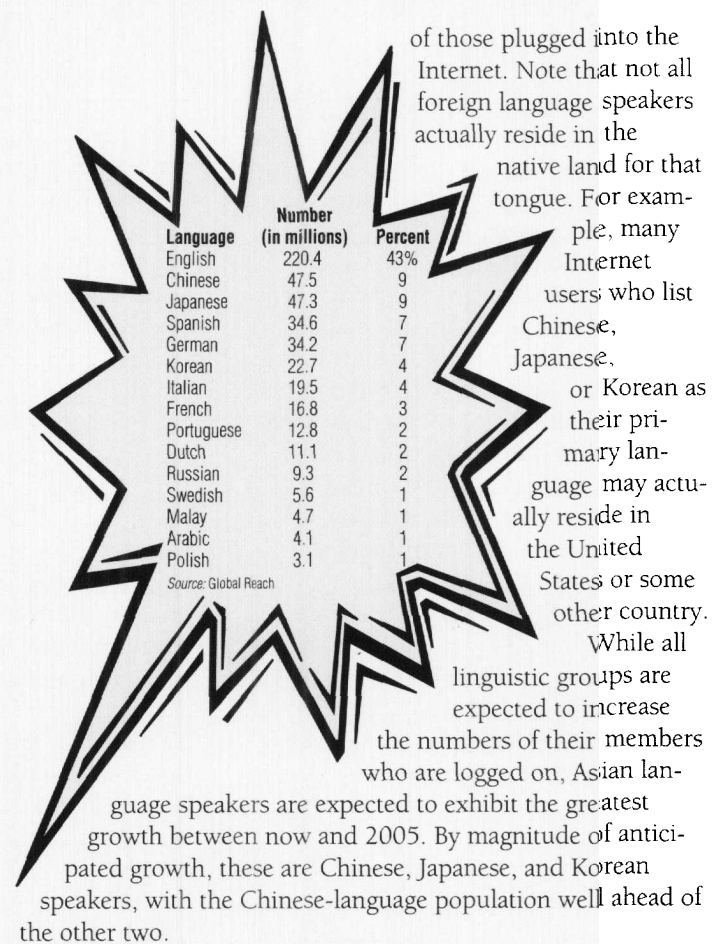
Top-20 "wired" countries

Country	Number (in millions)	Percent
United States	175.3	35%
Japan	47.0	9
Germany	27.5	5
China	26.5	5
United Kingdom	23.9	5
Korea	22.3	4
Italy	18.8	4
Canada	13.5	3
France	11.9	2
Taiwan	11.6	2
Brazil	11.1	2
Russia	9.2	2
Netherlands	8.7	2
Australia	8.5	2
Spain	7.0	1
Mexico	6.7	1
India	6.0	1
Sweden	5.6	1
Hong Kong	4.1	1
Malaysia	3.7	1

Source: Global Reach

Japanese (47.3 million), and Korean (22.7 million). Internet users who primarily speak a language other than English, a European language, or an Asian language comprise a negligible number. The following table lists the top-20 primary languages

Top-15 languages of Internet users



of those plugged into the Internet. Note that not all foreign language speakers actually reside in the native land for that tongue. For example, many Internet users who list Chinese, Japanese, or Korean as their primary language may actually reside in the United States or some other country.

While all linguistic groups are expected to increase the numbers of their members who are logged on, Asian language speakers are expected to exhibit the greatest growth between now and 2005. By magnitude of anticipated growth, these are Chinese, Japanese, and Korean speakers, with the Chinese-language population well ahead of the other two.

The other consideration for health care marketers looking to the Web as a source of marketing intelligence or a venue for promoting products and services is the linguistic content of the Internet. According to Global Reach, the majority (68.4%) of current Web content is in English. This is followed at a great distance by Japanese (5.9%), German (5.8%), Chinese (3.8%), French (3.0%), and Spanish (2.4%). The only surprise here is the low amount of Spanish-language content even though the Spanish-speaking online population is quite large. This is explained by the fact that approximately 40% of Spanish-speaking Internet users reside within the United States.

By putting global information at our fingertips, the Internet has helped bring companies and their target markets closer together. But to really benefit from this marketing tool, health care organizations need to take a closer look at the different people, countries, and languages that make up the wired world. ■